



LAKES TO LAND REGIONAL INITIATIVE

Introduction



Why a collaborative master plan?

Residents of 16 communities along the State of Michigan's northwestern coast have decided to join forces in order to commandeer their future and set a course to navigate their growth and development together.

The purpose

Michigan has never seen collaboration like this before.

A project that began as five townships striving for better coordination has expanded into the largest planning effort of its kind in the state. Ten townships, four villages, and two cities have come together to define themselves as belonging to one cohesive region with the potential to become more than the sum of its parts.

The unique formation represented in this report is designed to plan for the region while maintaining communities' individual identities. By undertaking the collaborative master planning process, residents have discovered ways to work together as a united front, sharing assets and collaborating

on ideas to achieve economic well-being and excellent quality of life. We can identify the role that our communities' unique assets play within both the region and the state, then use that understanding to shape the future we will all share.

The strategies

- Develop individual master plans for each community that doesn't have one;
- Identify regional collaborative opportunities;
- Identify cross-community collaborative opportunities;
- Develop community-specific and regional implementation strategies;
- Develop the organizational capacity necessary to implement the plan.

What is a master plan?

“Master plan” is a serious-sounding name, and indeed it’s a serious document. Intended to provide a clearly articulated vision of the community 15 to 20 years into the future, it either succinctly describes persistent concerns or defines the development of the “ideal” community. It also contains a guide to achieve that development based on careful study of many factors, and it can be legally referenced in land use decisions.

But before it’s all those things, a master plan is a dream.

The process of master planning begins with dreaming about how a community could be a better place to live. Citizens gather and share perspectives on their community’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We talk about what the physical spaces in a community mean to us, how we would like to use them, and what we could do to make them better. We consider the challenges facing us and the organizations we could enlist to help overcome those challenges.

These are issues which must be considered for the success of any community, and the residents of the communities participating in this collaboration have decided to take it into our own hands. We know that unless we take control of our destiny, individually and as a region, our dreams may be left to debate.

What is a collaborative master plan?

For the purposes of this planning process, a collaborative master plan is a document that contains an articulated vision, with defined goals and strategies, for the future development of a geographic area based upon input from members of more than one community.

Basically, it’s the same plan we just talked about—now with all our neighbors on board.

Planning at the local level is usually by definition limited to one community, but collaborative master plans have the luxury of erasing municipal boundaries to view the region as a whole. They are also synonymous with increasingly syllabic names like “regional strategic growth planning” or “regional asset-based land use development planning.”

This collaborative master plan contains a “statutorily compliant” (see next page for legalese) master plan for our unique community, along with a regional component that seeks to understand collaborative opportunities, goals, and strategies.

But...why?

The benefits of having an updated master plan are that it will:

- provide a point of reference for all land use decisions.
- prevent arbitrary or capricious decision-making.
- ensure wise use of resources.
- assist in preserving community assets.
- provide a sound basis for funding opportunities.

The benefits of collaborative master planning include:

- facilitating partnership within a geographical region.
- providing consistency between communities.
- helping communities identify and shares resources.
- protecting land use types and natural resource assets that cross municipal boundaries.
- providing a well-documented and justified basis for funding requests.
- understanding possible opportunities to achieve economies of scale.
- capitalizing on existing assets.
- understanding how sustainability

plays a role in maintaining a high quality of life for current and future generations.



1.1 The Lakes to Land Regional Initiative
Leadership Team

History of the regional initiative: What came before...

In the beginning, there were five.

As 2011 drew to a close, informal discussions among leaders in several communities had coalesced into a decision to forge ahead with a bold new idea: five neighboring townships would join forces to produce a cohesive set of master plans and implementation strategies. Initial assistance came from The Alliance for Economic Success (AES), an economic development organization serving Manistee County and the surrounding area that provides neutral third-party convener and facilitation services to develop organizational capacities and relationships. AES secured funding from the Michigan Department of Treasury State Economic Incentive Program, revised in 2011 to place heavy emphasis on coordination among communities, and the C.S. Mott Foundation. The beginnings of the Leadership Team were formed next and charged with the competitive bidding, interviewing, and selection of a professional planning consultant to guide and facilitate the process.

The five original communities quickly found company. Neighboring townships which did not have master plans seized the opportunity to create one, and communities which did have master plans asked to participate in the implementation phase. Within eight months, the collaboration had tripled in size to encompass 16 communities, signaling a hunger for cooperation. The end result is a defined region with potential collaborative partners and the possibility for greater success.

...and what we did next

The process of developing the collaborative and individual master plans began with the formal development of a Leadership Team. Consisting of representatives from each participating community, this team constituted the linchpin of the Initiative: members provided guidance to the consultants, acted as liaisons with their respective communities, and worked with their elected officials. Their first two action items were the selection of a name for the project and the decision to reach out and invite neighboring communities to join.

Next, the new Lakes to Land Initiative, or L2L as it is affectionately called, launched a media campaign. The lakestoland.org website was developed, Facebook and Twitter accounts were set up, a centralized phone number was dedicated, and email addresses of interested citizens were collected to begin a distribution list. Press releases kept local news outlets updated, and postcards were sent to every taxpayer within the participating communities inviting them to the visioning sessions. Leadership Team members hung posters advertising the visioning sessions and met with citizens face to face—often the most effective communication method available.

The visioning sessions, described in detail in Tab 3, were held throughout the summer in an effort to attract as many seasonal and non-seasonal residents as possible. Each participating community held a session, and two “make-up” visioning sessions were held for members of all communities who were not able to

Making it legal

According to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008, the general purpose of a master plan is to guide and accomplish, in the planning jurisdiction and its environs, development that satisfies all of the following criteria:

- is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical.
- considers the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land and population development.
- will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare.

It also has to talk about at least one of the following things:

- a system of transportation to lessen congestion on streets;
- safety from fire and other dangers;
- light and air;
- healthful and convenient distribution of population;
- good civic design and arrangement and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds;
- public utilities such as sewage disposal and water supply and other public improvements;
- recreation;
- the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability.

attend their own sessions. Visioning sessions were well attended, with some communities achieving over 100 individuals.

At the same time, presentations were given to individual planning commissions and regional conferences such as the Benzie County Water Festival, and Leadership Team members actively worked at inviting their neighboring communities to join the Initiative.

As the Initiative grew, it caught the attention of Michigan Governor Rick Snyder. Having recently begun a Placemaking Initiative connecting community development with economic development, Governor Snyder asked to audit the Lakes to Land Regional Initiative in hopes of developing strategies that could be replicated elsewhere in the State. Shortly thereafter, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources selected Lakes to Land Regional Initiative as a pilot project to assist with its own internal efforts in placemaking throughout the State. Meetings were held with representatives from Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, all charged with helping Governor Snyder further the State's Placemaking Initiative. Other pertinent organizations which attended the Leadership Team meetings included the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Benzie and Manistee County planning services, Michigan State University Extension Services, Hart Leadership Development, and the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.

Once all of the communities had master plan drafts, about 60 leadership team members, trustees, planning commissioners, and interested citizens attended a "Priority Sharing" meeting to discuss their communities' pertinent issues. The 69 submitted priorities were arranged into ten themes which could then serve as a basis for the formation of work committees. This process illustrated clearly the potential benefits of collaboration. A series of sessions was conducted during the master plans' public period that focused on capacity building and learning how to work with funders to maximize opportunities for implementation.

Participating

Communities which are developing a master plan as part of the Lakes to Land Regional Initiative:

Arcadia Township
 Bear Lake Township
 Village of Bear Lake
 Crystal Lake Township
 Gilmore Township
 Village of Honor
 Joyfield Township
 Manistee Township
 Pleasanton Township

Communities which have recently developed a master plan and wish to collaborate with regional neighbors on implementation:

Village of Elberta
 City of Frankfort
 Lake Township
 City of Manistee
 Onkama Community
 (Village and Township)

communities

The Lakes to Land communities are situated along the M-22 and US-31 corridors in Northwestern Michigan, stretching from the northern tip of Lake Township in Benzie County to the southern boundary of Manistee Township in Manistee County. It encompasses communities east of US-31 but adjacent to the highway, then continues west to the Lake Michigan shore.

In it are villages, cities, and townships displaying a range of character from rural agriculture to urbanized centers. Communities are adjacent to each other, have similar socio-economic statuses, and share geographic attributes such as natural resources.

All communities in the geographic area were informed of the Initiative and invited to join.

Haven't I seen you before?

Some of the communities have previously collaborated together. Onekama Township and the Village of Onekama recently developed a joint master plan to facilitate the creation of one greater Onekama municipality. Pleasanton Township, Bear Lake Township, and the Village of Bear Lake attempted to create a joint planning commission and master plan in 2007. The communities in the northern section of the region have had an opportunity to collaborate by developing a regional trail system that spans a number of municipalities.

Historical settlements

Lumber and railroads were defining influences on the communities in the Lakes to Land region—many towns grew up around sawmills or train stops, nourished by the economic lifeblood such enterprises provided. As the fortunes of those industries went, so too did the fate of a few of the settlements.

Descriptions of two such “ghost towns” in Benzie County date from the year 1877. Gilmore was “located in Blaine Township on the shore of Lake Michigan, 12 miles south of Benzonia. Settled in 1850. Wood and logs shipped. Tri-weekly stage to Frankfort and Pier Point. George B. Farley, Postmaster and general store.” A post office in Joyfield Township, 10 miles south of Benzonia, was described as “located on a fruit belt, mail by stage 4 times weekly. Amazia Joy, Postmaster and Pastor of the Baptist Church.”

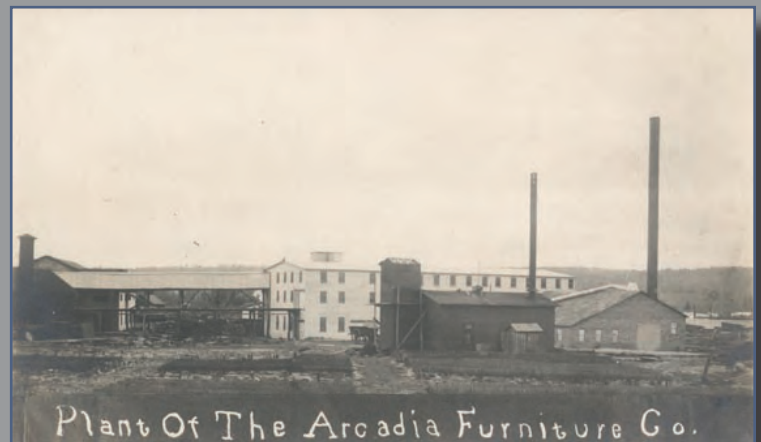
In 1883 Lake Township, the town of Edgewater was established on the northwest shore of Platte Lake and Aral settled in near Otter Creek. A narrow gauge railroad was built to carry lumber from the Platte Lumber Company to Lake Michigan, with docks at the shore. The Otter Creek Lumber Company, founded in 1891, reportedly shipped extensive material for the rebuilding of Chicago after the great fire of 1871. Lumbering took most of the maple, ash, oak, elm,

basswood, hemlock, and beech trees in the township, and the towns were gone by 1910.

In Manistee County, the town of Pleasanton, also called Saile Station, had 350 people in 1870. Eight miles east of Pierport and 25 miles north of Manistee, it was home to bucket manufacturers D. and R. Lumley along with a furniture maker, a basket manufacturer, and a blacksmith. Timber, potatoes, butter, and sugar were shipped out. The little hamlet was complete with two churches, a general store, and a school superintendent. Stage travel went to Manistee, Benzonia, and Traverse City, and in 1917 modernity arrived: it had telephone service and was listed as a stop on the Arcadia & Betsie River Railway. Further up on the A&BRR was a little town called Butwell, at the corner of Butwell and Taylor Roads, and all we know about a settlement named Burnham is that it was just due north of Arcadia on the county line.

Arcadia Township

The Arcadia & Betsie River Railroad, terminating in Arcadia, had extended over 17 miles to connect with the Chicago and West Michigan Railway by 1895. The line maintained an influx of goods to the area and allowed crop transportation from the fertile fields of the township to the markets of Chicago. There was also a good market for ice, which was cut from Bear Lake and hauled by wagon to A&BRR's Sorenson Station just east of Pleasanton Township from about 1890 until 1937. The Arcadia Furniture Factory on the north end of Bar Lake manufactured both furniture and fine veneers to be sold in Macy's in New York City. The Village of Arcadia, originally named Starkeville after lumberman Henry



1.2 Arcadia Furniture Factory

Constructed in 1906 after the Starke Sawmill burned down.
Photo: Arcadia Historical Museum.

Starke, changed its moniker to match the township in 1870. Anne M. Dempster opened the post office in 1870. Just north of town was a notable "fancy house," which soared in popularity when proprietors struck upon the novel idea of sending a wagon to Arcadia's pier to greet incoming sailors.

Bear Lake Township and the Village of Bear Lake

The earliest inhabitants of the area now encompassed by Bear Lake Township were the Odawa, marking their legacy by leaving behind an impressive number of artifacts. It is thought a burial ground exists near Pierport's artesian well, and a great battle may have taken place near "Brown town," where farmers reported clearing their fields and discovering large numbers of arrowheads and even tomahawks. A silver crucifix found in the area and dated 1664 indicates early contact with Jesuit missionaries, perhaps even explorer Father Jacques Marquette. The first non-Native settlers included Russell Smith, who built his homestead in 1863 on the south side of Bear Lake with the idea of a future village and offered up 12 acres to anyone who would come in and start one. John S. Carpenter and Eliphate Harrington



1.3 Bear Lake School

Legend has it that Crystal Lake was formed by Paul Bunyan, a mighty lumberjack whose mighty big boot carved a footprint along the shore of Lake Michigan.

took him up, building a small store, a boarding house, a steam saw, and grist mill before selling out a few years later to George W. and David H. Hopkins. The Village of Bear Lake was incorporated in 1893.

On June 1, 1876, the Bear Lake Tram Railway began using horse-drawn freight cars to connect the growing village with the docks at Pierport, throwing the gateway to the rich markets of Milwaukee and Chicago open to full throttle. The last of the lumber soon slipped out, followed at close quarters by some early settlers including George Hopkins. By the 1930s, the freshly-cleared land had been put to use producing admirable quantities of blueberries, apples, and cherries. Many local families found seasonal employment on the farms, and the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians has noted the Odawa summer camp located along the shores of Bear Lake during the 1930s through 1950s.

Blaine Township

Blaine Township was founded in 1851 as the location of the Loyed & Thomas sawmill near Herring Lake. But its raison d'être didn't last long: an unusually high water level in 1862 destroyed the dam across the creek, lowering Upper Herring Lake's water level by three feet and rendering the mill unsalvageable. Despite this setback, the township continued to grow, and its official organization in

1867 included the area that is now Gilmore Township. A large commercial fishery founded by John Babinaw ½ mile south of lower Herring Lake shipped thousands of tons of whitefish, herring, and trout to Chicago and Milwaukee.

Crystal Lake Township

Legend has it that Crystal Lake was formed by Paul Bunyan, a mighty lumberjack whose mighty big boot carved a footprint along the shore of Lake Michigan. The township that bears its name is not only the oldest in Benzie County, but predates the county itself by four years. Organized in 1859, Crystal Lake Township's vast area included nearly the entire county. The township's population expanded steadily, especially after the Homestead Act of 1862. One settler who stayed to raise a family was Hiram M. Spicer, a former school teacher who contracted typhus while serving in the Federal Army from 1863 to 1865 and may have moved to northern Michigan to avail himself of its renowned healthful air. Spicer became an accomplished horticulturist, and his 21-acre farm produced abundant quantities of peaches, apples, grapes, and cherries. He also served as Township Supervisor from 1874 until at least 1884. He helped construct a harbor, provided most of the harbor's pilings, and was twice nominated for the state legislature.

City of Frankfort

A Michigan Historical Marker on the north side of the channel connecting Betsie Lake with Lake Michigan proclaims a piece of Frankfort's earliest history: it may have been the site where the famed Father Marquette died in 1675. In 1852, Joseph Oliver bought 14 acres between Lake Aux Becs Scies—French for “of sawbill ducks”—and Lake Michigan to become the first settler of what would become Frankfort. Three years later, a schooner owned by investor George W. Tifft from Cleveland blew into the little-known harbor seeking refuge from a storm; Tifft promptly bought a thousand acres surrounding the lake and sold it to a development company from Detroit. The first township meeting of the original, massive Crystal Lake Township was held in Frankfort in 1859, and the town became Benzie's county seat ten years later. By 1867, the United States government had taken notice of the Aux Becs Scies harbor and commenced improvements. Former Congressman and Montana territorial governor Jim Ashley capped off the northwestern journey of his Ann Arbor Railroad with the 1892 purchase of a small local line that connected it to Lake Michigan at Frankfort, and then the company built the lavish 250-room Royal Frontenac Hotel to attract tourists by both rail and water.

Village of Honor

About the first of April, 1885, Guelph Patent Cask Company foreman E.T. Henry arrived on the grounds with a crew of men and a small portable sawmill and began to clear a place for a set of camps, naming the settlement “Honor” in compliment to the baby



1.4 Frankfort harbor entrance



1.5 Downtown Frankfort, 1940



1.6 Platte River Trout Pond rearing grounds before the state hatchery

daughter of Guelph general manager J.A. Gifford. Hardly a quarter-century later, the 600-resident village was made the county seat by popular vote and later became the site of a well-known and heavily attended annual reunion of Civil War vets (probably due in part to the name of the town—what veteran's group wouldn't want to meet in Honor?). The Seymour and Peck Company, successor to the Guelph Patent Cask Company, shipped veneer to Chicago while the Desmond Chemical Company Plant at Carter Siding converting cordwood into charcoal, alcohol, acetate and other wood derivatives. In 1953, Honor saw the opening of the Cherry Bowl Drive-In Theater, now lovingly restored and one of the oldest continually operating drive-in theaters in America, and Coho salmon were introduced to the area in 1966 through the Platte River Fish Hatchery.

Gilmore Township and the Village of Elberta

At just 7.25 square miles, Gilmore Township is the smallest in Michigan. The area was first settled in 1855 by Joseph Robar and John B. Dory, and the first improvements to Gilmore Township's harbor on beautiful Betsie Bay occurred in 1859. The harbor was deepened and piers were constructed; these proved vital to the fledgling settlement's future growth, which would depend heavily upon the shipping industry. In 1892, the Ann Arbor Railroad launched the world's first car-ferry service from Betsie Bay. Rail cars carrying lumber, coal, and grain now had a rapid shortcut to the shores of Wisconsin.

Elberta, the only village in Gilmore Township, was first settled in 1855. Early luminaries include L.W. Crane, lumberman and founder of the

local sawmill, built in 1872, and James Gillmore, Benzie County's first newspaper publisher and the gentleman for whom the township was named. The home of a sawmill, a broom handle factory, and Frankfort Furnace, it shipped out wood, lumber, handles, bark, and pig iron. In 1887, the United States Coast Guard installed a Life-Saving Station on Elberta's Lake Michigan shore that operated for nearly 50 years until a larger new facility was built about a half mile away.

Joyfield Township

Reverend Amariah Joy, a Baptist minister from Putney, Vermont, filed Benzie County's first homestead claim on July 11, 1863 and quickly discovered the realities of life in the wilderness: few people and even fewer roads. But he and his wife Frances settled their homestead of 160 acres and Joy went on to become the first

1.7 A car ferry returns to Elberta, 1930s



1.8 Manistee Historic Salt and Logging Operations



Unless otherwise noted, historical photos are from the UpNorth Memories online collection by Don Harrison stores.ebay.com/UpNorth-Memories-Collection

postmaster and then supervisor of the township that bears his name. He was succeeded first by his son and a year later by Charles H. Palmer, a New York teacher who had traveled to Ecuador and California before enlisting in the Civil War. After the war, Palmer made his Michigan homestead claim in November 1866 and resumed teaching while he cleared his land for planting. Eventually his farm boasted a respectable 30 cultivated acres, including 1,500 fruit trees and a unique specialty in nut cultivation.

Lake Township

The Platte River Campground at M-22 on the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has a loooooong history: artifacts dating from the period between 600 BC and 1640 AD suggest a little settlement, smaller than a village, in which Natives used the area on a seasonal basis “actually very much like what campers are doing today.” By 1873, the corner of Michigan made up of forests, the lower Platte River, Otter Creek, Bass Lake, Otter Lake, Long Lake, Platte Lake, Little Platte Lake, Loon Lake (originally Round Lake), and part of Crystal Lake became known quite fittingly as Lake Township. The lighthouse at Point Betsie was lit in 1858, and Alonzo J. Slyfield served for 22 years as its keeper. As the lumber boom wound down at the turn of the century, resorts became the other economic staple for fishing, hunting, and summer guests. Chimney Corners opened in 1910, and Crystal Downs—known as one of the best golf courses in the US—was established in 1927.



1.9 Lake view from the top of Prospect Ave., Onekama

City of Manistee

The name “Manistee” is from an Ojibwa word first applied to the principal river of the county. The derivation is not certain, but it may be from *ministigweyaa*, “river with islands at its mouth.” Other sources claim that it was an Ojibwe term meaning “spirit of the woods.”

In 1841, the John Stronach family constructed a sawmill on Manistee Lake and later another on the Manistee River. By 1849, more settlers were arriving and the reservation was dismantled, with land given to settlers. The city was set back in 1871 when a fire swept through and destroyed over one-half of the city’s buildings. Much was rebuilt, this time of brick.

In 1881, salt was discovered beneath Manistee and another industry was born. By 1885, there were forty sawmills operating and by the end of the century the population reached 14,260. Manistee claimed to have more millionaires per capita than any other city in the United States. They also had city-provided fire protection, a parks department, water, sewer and street lighting.

After 150 years Manistee County has both changed and remained the same. The early boom years of lumbering and exhaustive agriculture have evolved into a stable, diversified industrial base and a top fruit-producing agricultural center. It is the beauty and natural wonder that abounds in the region’s forests, lakes and rivers that remain a constant factor and will always make Manistee County a special place to live and visit.

Manistee Township

Although Manistee County was “set off” as early as 1840, giving it a name and a geographic region, it wasn’t officially “organized” until the state legislature divided it into three townships in 1855: Stronach, Brown, and Manistee. The tax rolls of that year showed over half the county’s valuation in Manistee Township, situated along the Lake Michigan shoreline and host to the Manistee River’s westward journey into Manistee Lake.

Two sawmills with surrounding dwellings lined the lake and eventually grew into the communities of Eastlake and Parkdale. The adjacent farms were among the most successful in the county, in part because of the ready market in the nearby city. The Manistee National Forest brushes the southeast corner of the township, blanketing the land south of the Manistee River and about two miles inland of Eastlake with trees regrown in the wake of the logging industry.

Onkama Township

When Adam Stronach sought a place to build a sawmill in 1845, he knew

the wooded acres along Portage Lake would be ideal. The area was known to settlers as early as 1840 by its Odawa name, onekamenk, or “portage.”

Although its inhabitants called it by its English name for a time, there was another Portage, Michigan and the townspeople voted for a reversion to its historic name of Onkama in 1871. Though the lumber industry was crucial to early development, sawmills and citizens didn’t always mix. Residents fed up with the unnaturally high water

areas were now open to settlement, and the town largely relocated.

Pleasanton Township

Perhaps it was the verdant fields and forests that attracted George B. Pierce, a retired minister seeking a healthy atmosphere on a new frontier, to what was then Brown Township in 1863. When Pleasanton was established separately the following year, he became its first postmaster. By 1870,

Pleasanton Township was home to 65 families, the first shop and school were established, and the first sawmill would arrive in 1871. As settlement surrounding Bear Lake grew just a mile south of the township’s border, residents took advantage of new markets for local timber and forest products. Life became increasingly

By one account, a reveler at a celebration of the new post office took the occasion to hitch his ox to a log in the dam and pull it out, lowering the level of Portage Lake within a few hours and washing much of old Portage out to Lake Michigan.

levels in Portage Lake, raised to power the sawmill, took matters into their own hands. By one account, a reveler at a celebration of the new post office took the occasion to hitch his ox to a log in the dam and pull it out, lowering the level of Portage Lake within a few hours and washing much of old Portage out to Lake Michigan. Portage Creek dried out, previously submerged

civilized for Pleasanton’s inhabitants. By 1880, the community would boast two schools, a public library, a fenced cemetery, and two churches. A local resident was quoted in August 1877 as saying, “[W]hoever chronicles the history of Pleasanton ten years hence will no doubt inform the world that it is one of the most flourishing towns in the State of Michigan.”